

SIX DAYS A WEEK IN VIENNA.

PROLOGUE.

Place. Offices of the Federation Student Relief in Vienna University.

Time. 9-30 a.m. Any Week-day. Summer Term, 1920.

A long queue of men and women students stands patiently outside a closed door, on which appears a notice stating that personal applications for a daily breakfast, costing 50 hellers (¼d. in English money), would be received on that and ensuing days, and requesting that each applicant should bring certain State and University papers, relating to birth, income, family conditions and so forth.

From the humanitarian or analytical standpoint it is an interesting gathering, representative of over twenty States, of many creeds and of all classes. One common factor brings them together, obliterating for the time all differences of temperament, thought, religion and race—that factor, misery and need. White faces, darkly-lined eyes, thin bodies, nervous gestures or apathetic indifference; some lean weakly against the wall; others, with damp foreheads, stand grimly upright; many are wearing battered military uniforms, others, much-pressed and mended pre-war civilian clothes; all these signs are significant of the Spectre which haunts Austria and other Central European countries.

SCENE I.

Ten o'clock strikes, and the door opens to receive the first four applicants, each of whom finds himself at one side of a small table, faced by a Relief Worker, by whom he is engaged in rapid dialogue:—

Relief Worker (reading quickly through the document handed to him)—“Do you live with your parents?” Student—“I live with my mother. My father was a General and was killed in the War.” R.W.—“Then this figure represents your mother's yearly pension?” (probably about 8,000 crowns—£8 in English money). St.—“Yes. I give a few lessons, and my sister does needlework for a shop, and we live as best we can.” R.W. (making notes)—“Where do you have your meals?” St.—“I have dinner in the University Mensa and supper at home.” R.W.—“And breakfast?” St. (embarrassed)—“I sometimes have a cup of black coffee, but our bread ration is so small that we cannot save any for the third meal.” R.W.—“When will you get your degree?” St.—“Next autumn, I hope.” R.W.—“A list of the names chosen for

the Breakfast will be put up in the Aula on Friday. See if your name is on it." With swift thanks the man leaves, and is immediately replaced at the table by a woman student.

St.—"My father is a watchmaker, and I have six brothers and sisters, two of them earning a little; the two youngest are tubercular. Our home was devastated in 1915, when the Russians advanced into Poland, and we fled to Vienna." R.W.—"Do you try to earn anything?" St.—"I give lessons, but pupils are hard to find." R.W.—"What faculty?" St.—"Letters and philosophy." R.W.—"What will you do when you have finished your course?" St.—"I mean to go back to Poland and be a teacher, so that my parents can take the children back to the country."

The next applicant is a mere boy, unmistakably tubercular. His coat is closely buttoned and the collar turned up to his ears, the reason being that he has no shirt.

R.W.—"Tell me a little about yourself." St.—"My parents live in a small town, where my father is a bank clerk. I have two little sisters. I was a student in Vienna before the War, and, when demobilised, I came back to finish my medical course. I share a kabinetta (garret) with another student." R.W.—"What do you live upon?" St.—"I keep myself by working in a restaurant kitchen from 6 till 11 each evening, and I have a small disablement pension from the Army of 100 crowns per month." R.W.—"Would you go and see our doctor if I gave you a card?" St.—"Yes, but I have an Army certificate stating that I am 60% unfit, suffering from tuberculosis in both lungs, due to exposure in the Pripet Marshes." R.W. (writing a card)—"See this doctor, and bring me back his report as soon as you can."

So it goes on, case after case, varying only slightly, and the need of one differing but the shade of a degree from the need of another. Few applicants have the 500 crowns per month, the estimated minimum required for the barest necessities of life; therefore few have escaped the dangers of under-nourishment and partial starvation.

SCENE II.

Place. Main Hall of the University.

Representative Committees have already been formed from amongst the University students to help the relief workers through all the pitfalls and intricacies of administering the Breakfast and other Relief Schemes. These Committees are as fully representative as possible of all sections in the University, faculties, religions, political parties and races, thus guarding against any appearance of partiality.

After careful consideration and heartbreaking eliminations by the relief workers and the Student Committees, the list of nominations is posted up in the main Hall of the University, and breakfast cards are issued, good for 30 days, to be renewed if wisely used and well allocated.

The list contains about 1,200 names, and is the centre of anxious crowds for several days. Pleasure and excitement lights the eyes of the successful candidate. Sadness and resignation darkens the face of the one whose name is not included. In many cases the Office is the scene of recriminations or of woeful pleadings; the most difficult part of the relief worker's task is to explain that choice has been founded on careful investigation, and that there are only supplies enough for the most urgent cases of need.

SCENE III.

Place. A Buffet, looking on to the University Quadrangle.

Time. Any morning between 7-30 and 9-30.

The Buffet is well filled with men and women students, sitting in groups of three or four round small white tables, talking, and sometimes laughing, but real laughter is rarely heard in Vienna nowadays. A fierce-looking youth, with hair *en brosse*, sits just inside the door, punching breakfast tickets and collecting 50 hellers each from the incomers, before these proceed to the counter where two women medical students preside over cups of rich cocoa and large slices of white bread. A big notice on the wall tactfully announces that the breakfasts are provided by fellow-students from all over the world for the students of Vienna University as a token of sympathy and unity.

The room contains as heterogeneous a crowd as could be found anywhere—Austrians, Poles, Hungarians, Czechs, Slavs, Serbs, Bulgars, Turks, Christians, Jews, Agnostics, Bolsheviks, Monarchists, Republicans, Socialists, Anarchists. Physical need prompts them to apply for this daily sustenance, and for some of them it is not easy to beg charity, but in a paralysed country there is so little opening for self-supporting work. In practice, this Relief Scheme, administered by the representatives of fellow-students of other lands, awakens in them a feeling that they are in the midst of some Utopia, where prejudice and party differences have no place, and where kindness and cheer are the order of the hour.

And so the breakfast period slips by, students coming and going, some eating hastily with eyes on the clock, others, forgetful of lectures, sitting on in conversation and enjoyment.

EPILOGUE.

Extract from an Austrian woman student's letter.

DEAR GNAEDIGE FRAU,

I am writing this note to you during an Anatomy lecture, because I must tell you that this is the first morning that I have been at the breakfasts, and it is also the first morning for over a year that I have not felt ill and faint by twelve o'clock. I wish that I could write and thank all the students of other countries who have contributed to help me and my friends in the University. They will never know how grateful (and here followed more thanks than the modesty of other nations can face).

To-Morrow Morning at Breakfast Try to Forget

that

THOUSANDS OF STUDENTS HAVE BEEN REFUSED THIS BREAKFAST

by our Relief Committee in Austria alone for lack of funds. We could open similar work urgently demanded in other lands, to-morrow, if we had the money.

The cost price of each breakfast is THREEPENCE.

£1 will provide a student with breakfast for THREE MONTHS.

To supply even this scanty breakfast of cocoa and bread to 5,000 students in Austria as we are now doing, we require *half a ton of flour* alone daily. If the scheme is to be carried on throughout the academic year, there are

**WANTED,
150 tons of flour,
2,680 cases of Condensed Milk.
15 tons of Cocoa.**

All money raised for this purpose should be sent to our Treasurer,

M. Louis Hess, 13, Avenue de Champel, Geneva, Switzerland.

November, 1920.

**WORLD'S STUDENT CHRISTIAN FEDERATION
EUROPEAN STUDENT RELIEF.**

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